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ABSTRACT

A study investigated whether students comprehend more from a Black teacher using Black English and whether Black students view a Black teacher using Black dialect as being more credible than one without Black speech characteristics. The research consisted of a pilot study with White students to test the appropriateness of the instruments and methodology developed, and a full-scale study with 72 Black high school speech students who were divided into three groups. Two 12-minute audiotapes providing instructional material in both standard English and Black dialect, spoken by the same individual, were presented to two of the student groups as a normal classroom exercise, with the third group maintained as a control group. Following the tapes, the two experimental groups were asked to complete an information test and semantic differential scales concerning the expertise, dynamism, and friendliness of the speaker; the third group completed only the information test. Analysis of the results suggested that there was a difference in comprehension between the two treatments, but that it was statistically insignificant. It also suggested that there was a perceived difference in credibility, with the Black students rating the Black speech as more credible, but that this difference also was statistically insignificant. (MSE)

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BLACK STUDENTS' RESPONSES TO ORAL INSTRUCTIONS PRESENTED IN BLACK ENGLISH VERSUS STANDARD ENGLISH

by

Dorothy K. Williamson-Ige

Part of this paper was presented in a Master of Arts in Communication Thesis supervised by William J. Jordan at Central Missouri State University, Warrensburg, Missouri, May, 1973.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Dorothy K. Williamson-Ige

In the past few years, an increasing amount of attention has been given to the dialect of the black American. The reading ability, test performance, verbal, and nonverbal behavior of the black pupil has caused concern on the part of teachers, researchers, and other interested personnel. Government programs such as Headstart, bussing, and various poverty programs have been set up with the hope of helping the black student learn how to communicate better in the larger white society. Since black dialect deals with communication, speech teachers and researchers have been especially concerned with communication problems of black dialect speakers.

The Study of Nonstandard English by William Labov is a discussion of nonstandard dialects and their relationship to the classroom. Rather than dwelling on the differences of black dialect, Labov centers his discussion around the similarity of dialects to standard English and how black dialect carries out the same functions as standard English, but by different rules. He also explores the characteristics of black dialect and the possibility of teachers carrying on sociolinguistic research within the classroom.[1]

Nonstandard Dialect, a publication by the National Council of Teachers of English, gives an overview of the problem of nonstandard English speakers and provides a rather specific plan for the teaching of standard English to these speakers. The publication offers a philosophy, content, and program of instruction to help students become more proficient in using standard English. The program is based on the concept that home dialects are acceptable in appropriate situations, but that all students must understand the need for standard English and learn how to use standard English in order to achieve greater social and economical success in this society.[2]

Research studies have been conducted dealing with the effects of black dialect upon listeners. "The Psychological Correlates of Speech Characteristics: On Sounding 'Disadvantaged'," by Frederick Williams, is one of the more important studies attempting to show the judgmental process of teachers' attitude toward the language of school children. The study used audio taped speech samples of children of varying social status and ethnicity. Inner-city teachers evaluated these samples. Williams found that judgments of social status coincided more for black students than for white students. Though the difference was not great, more dependence between race and status took place on the

part of white teachers than black teachers. White teachers tended to rank high status children as being white, even if the children were black.[3]

Another significant study is "Teachers' Evaluations of Children's Speech," by Frederick Williams, Jack L. Whitehead, and Jane Traupmann. This study focused on the development of an attitude evaluation instrument for teachers to evaluate videotaped speech samples of students from different ethnic and status categories. Teachers rated middle income white and black children as being more confident-eager than Mexican American children. However, in lower income groups, teachers rated white and Mexican American children as being more confident-eager than black children. The research suggested that teachers consistently evaluate children's speech on self-derived dimensions of confidence-eagerness and ethnicity-nonstandardness.[4]

Several studies have focused on social stereotyping. W. F. Lambert and his colleagues reported findings on attitudes toward language differences. They asked English and French speaking samples of Montreal students to evaluate personality characteristics of recorded English and French speakers. The subjects were unaware of the fact that the speakers on the tapes were bilingual speakers. The subjects

were exposed to recordings that included several matched voices, that is, speakers who read a passage in English then read the same passage in French. Both English and French subjects tended to evaluate the English speech as being more favorable than French speech, even when read by the same voice. The evaluation of French guises by French speaking subjects tended to be less favorable than for English speaking subjects. The study suggested that the results may have been due to the fact that English speakers at that time held the dominant economic and social positions in Montreal.[5] The significance of the study here is that it reinforces the idea that minority groups are often tagged with unfavorable personality, social, and ethnic traits because of the way they speak.

The studies mentioned here indicate the strong tendency of listeners to associate speech and language characteristics with social status, education, occupation, personality, and appearance of speakers. The studies also indicate that almost all of the literature dealing with black dialect on a teacher-student relationship has focused on the teacher's perception of the student who uses black dialect speech characteristics. The writer is unaware of any research that has recorded the black student's perception of a black teacher who uses black dialect. Because so

little research is available, teachers and administrators probably do not know how the black student feels toward instructional material presented in his home language being used in the classroom. Many black students yet attend predominantly black schools. This is especially true of many of the inner-city schools. Knowledge of this information may be of major concern to teachers and administrators who work in these schools. Black teachers may wonder whether their language is detrimental or ego-boosting to the child. Administrators may wonder whether they should hire black teachers who have no traces of black dialect in their speech, or whether they should hire black teachers who can slip freely back and forth from black dialect to standard English. Interest may also be stimulated for those who wonder whether or not to purchase or develop teaching materials in black dialect.

This study asks two research questions. Will black students be able to comprehend more from a black teacher who uses black dialect rather than standard English? Will black students view a black teacher who uses the dialect as being more credible than one who does not use any black dialect speech characteristics? Perhaps the findings given here can shed practical knowledge on the subject. Perhaps this knowledge will be of interest to personnel in all

facets of education who may be curious over the black student's response to black dialect used in the classroom as instructional material.

FOOTNOTES

[1]William Labov, The Study of Nonstandard English (Washington D. C.: Center of Applied Linguistics, 1969), pp. 1-68.

[2]New York Board of Education/National Council of Teachers of English, Nonstandard Dialect (Champaign, Illinois: National Council of Teachers of English, 1968), pp. 1-38.

[3]Frederick Williams, "The Psychological Correlates of Speech Characteristics: On Sounding 'Disadvantaged'," Journal of Speech and Hearing Research, XIII (September, 1970), 472-488.

[4]Frederick Williams, Jack Whitehead, and Jane Traupmann, "Teachers' Evaluations of Children's Speech," Speech Teacher, XX (November, 1971), 247-254.

[5]W. F. Lambert, R. C. Hodgson, R. C. Gardner, and S. Fillenbaum, "Evaluational Reactions of Spoken Languages," Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology, LX (January, 1960), 44-51.

CHAPTER II

PILOT STUDY

A pilot study was conducted in order to insure the appropriateness of the instruments and methodology to be used for the actual study. The pilot study served two purposes. First it tested the reliability and validity of the audio tapes and information test to be used in the study. Secondly it afforded the researcher an opportunity to conduct a "dry run" in order to make any necessary changes in the instruments and methodology.

Development of the Research Instruments

The audio tapes used in the pilot study were approximately twelve minute learning tapes. One tape was a lecture on supporting material delivered in standard English, while the other tape was the same lecture on supporting material delivered using black dialect speech. The content of both lectures were delivered by a black female graduate student majoring in speech communication.

A research study by Roger W. Shuy and his colleagues suggested that subjects can identify dialect in speech in as few as thirty seconds.[1] Keeping this information in mind, it was the constant effort of the researcher and the speaker on the recording to make sure that no dialect slipped into

the script or delivery of the standard English message. The second tape, using black dialect, contained the same message, almost sentence for sentence, that was given on the standard English tape. Black dialect speech characteristics such as alteration of syntax, semantic differences, and more concrete language were included in the black dialect tape. The speaker took care to make each tape sound natural. Both messages were delivered using qualities of oral style such as rhetorical questions, transitional sentences, repetition, and personal pronouns in hope that the tapes would sound as if they were learning tapes rather than dry reading. **The final messages were reel to reel tape recordings made at Central Missouri State University radio studio.**

The information test was developed for practical application in the study to measure subjects' comprehension of the stimulus materials. This objective test consisted of twenty multiple choice questions that covered the information given in the taped messages. The multiple choice test was chosen because it seemed more susceptible to analysis than other types of tests. It was also practical because there was only one correct answer for each question. Since the test simply consisted of circling the letter by

the correct answer, it was easy for the subjects to respond to the questions.

To measure source credibility and language differences between the two tapes, semantic differential type scales were used in the pilot study. There were six of these scales. They were:

1. The speaker sounds:
   Informed__:__:__:__:__:__:__Uninformed

2. The speaker's language sounds like:
   Good Grammar__:__:__:__:__:__:__Poor Grammar

3. The speaker sounds:
   Qualified__:__:__:__:__:__:__Unqualified

4. The speaker's English is:
   Acceptable__:__:__:__:__:__:__Unacceptable

5. The speaker sounds:
   White__:__:__:__:__:__:__Non-White

6. The speaker sounds:
   Expert__:__:__:__:__:__:__Inexpert

Scales 1,3, and 6 were used in the pilot to test the credibility of the speaker. Scales 2 and 4 measured language acceptability. Scale 5 measured the ethnicity of the source. Semantic differential type scales were chosen over other measuring instruments because most researchers seem to agree that the scales meet the assumptions required for parametric statistics. The scales used in the pilot study were devised and used as exploratory scales to obtain information on the source's language as well as expertness.

Procedures and Methodology

The subjects used for the pilot study were thirty-five white high school speech students in two speech classes at University High School at Warrensburg, Missouri. These students were used for the pilot study because they were easily accessible. The fact that the subjects were white did not bother the researcher as the purpose of the pilot study was to test the instruments, not to seek responses that would prove or disprove the research hypotheses.

Group I was first given the information test to complete. Next they were exposed to one minute of the standard English message. Afterwards they completed the semantic scales designed to measure source characteristics. The subjects listened to the remainder of the standard English message. Finally the same information test was administered to them a second time. The subjects in Group II followed the same procedure as Group I; the only difference being that they heard the black dialect message. The two groups were given the information test before and after the stimulus material to determine whether or not the test questions reflected learning from the message. In other words, the procedure tested the information test. As was mentioned earlier, it is thought that dialect can be detected in speech behavior in as few as thirty

seconds. Thus, approximately sixty seconds of the tape was played before the subjects in each group responded to the message on the scales. This procedure was to test the messages. If any black dialect characteristics accidently slipped into the standard English version, or vice versa, the subjects should have been able to detect such characteristics. Further, this test was conducted after sixty seconds to eliminate message content from affecting listeners' judgments.

The study at University High in Warrensburg was administered by a white male graduate student majoring in speech communication. The regular classroom teacher was present while the study was administered.

Data Analysis of the Pilot Study

Hypothesis one concerned comprehension. It was hypothesized that comprehension would be different between language treatments. Table 1 shows the analysis of variance for the comprehension scores:

TABLE 1

ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE FOR COMPREHENSION SCORES IN PILOT

Source	SS	df	MS	F
A pre-post	204.19	1	204.19	28.20*
B lang.	15.19	1	15.19	2.10
AB	99.19	1	99.19	13.70*
Error	318.56	44	7.24	
Totals	637.13	47		

$F_{95}(40,1) = 4.08$

*$p < .05$.

As the table shows, no significant variations occurred between the dialect and standard English versions. This may have been due to the all white sample, and the small sample size.

In addition, the information test was analyzed for internal reliability and validity. According to the Kuder-Richardson-Hoyt test, reliability for the comprehension test was $r = .86$. To measure the validity of the test, comprehension responses were taken prior to the messages on the tapes and after the stimulus messages. As illustrated in Table 1, the data analysis showed $F = 28.20$ ($F_{95} = 4.08$, $p < .01$).

Hypothesis two predicted that credibility ratings for the speaker would be different for each language treatment. The three semantic differential type scales measuring expertness were used to test the hypothesis that credibility differences occur between language treatments. The pilot research revealed a difference in the expert dimension of credibility. The mean for Group I on the credibility scales was 6.17. The mean for Group II was 2.33, ($t = 3.49$, $p < .01$). This suggested that students perceived the dialect speaker as having significantly less expertness than the same speaker using standard English.

The three scales that were devised and used as exploratory scales to check the validity of the language characteristics of the message were also subjected to

data analysis. The responses to the standard English message and the black dialect message were measured on three semantic type differential scales: White-Non White; Grammatical-Ungrammatical; and Acceptable-Unacceptable. The first scale, White-Non White, failed to correlate with the other two scales. ($r_{1.2} = .12$) ($r_{1.3} = -.20$). The remaining two scales correlated. ($r_{2.3} = .55$, $p < .01$). For the White-Non White scale, the mean for Group I (standard English) was 1.13. The mean for Group II (black dialect) was 2.16; ($t = 3.62$, $p < .01$). This suggested that the group who listened to the standard English tape viewed the speaker as being white considerably more than the group who listened to the black dialect tape.

Since the Grammatical-Ungrammatical scale and the Acceptable-Unacceptable scales correlated, they were combined. The mean for Group I on this set of scales was 3.56 while the mean for Group II was -.92; ($t = 4.19$, $p < .01$). This finding indicated that Group I considered the standard English speech significantly more grammatical and acceptable than Group II considered the black dialect speech.

Thus the data analysis of the scales used for the pilot study suggested that there was a significant difference in expertness and language characteristics perceived by the pilot subjects; between standard English and black dialect speech, even when spoken by the same voice.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Roger W. Shuy, Joan C. Baratz, and Walter A. Wolfram, "Sociolinguistic Factors in Speech Identification," National Institute of Mental Health Research Project No. MH-15048-01, Center of Applied Linguistics. 1969, in Frederick Williams, Jack Whitehead, and Jane Traupmann, "Teachers' Evaluations of Children's Speech," Speech Teacher, XX (November, 1971), 247-254.

CHAPTER III

PROCEDURES AND ANALYSIS

After determining the reliability and validity of the instruments through the pilot study results, the research study was conducted. With the exception of the semantic type scales, the instruments used for the research study were the same instruments used in the pilot study. A set of nine scales which supposedly measured expertness, dynamism, and friendliness were used.[1] The scales were used to give a more complete description of the effect of language in receivers.

A. Expertness Dimension
   1. Skilled:Unskilled
   2. Informed:Uninformed
   3. Experienced:Inexperienced

B. Dynamism Dimension
   1. Aggressive:Meek
   2. Energetic:Tired
   3. Active:Passive

C. Friendliness:Dimension
   1. Friendly:Unfriendly
   2. Honest:Dishonest
   3. Kind:Cruel

Subjects

The subjects for the research study were seventy-eight black students in four high school speech classes at Central High School in Kansas City, Missouri. Central High School is a predominantly black high school, therefore,

the subjects proved an excellent sampling for the purpose of the study.

Administration

The students were divided into three groups. Group I consisted of thirty-two students who listened to the recording of the standard English message on supporting material, completed the information test, and completed the semantic differential type scales. Group II consisted of twenty-two students who listened to the recording of the black dialect message on supporting material, took the same information test given to Group I, and completed the same set of semantic differential type scales. Group III consisted of twenty-four students who were not exposed to any stimulus material. They simply completed the information test. The stimulus material and information test was administered to Group I and Group II by the regular classroom teacher with the permission of the teacher and the administration. The regular classroom teacher administered the material as a normal classroom exercise in order to receive as normal response from the subjects as possible. The only major difference in handling the classroom activity as usual was that the subjects were instructed not to write their names on the feedback material.

One teacher administered the entire study for Group I. The teacher gave the statement "Today we are going to listen to a taped lecture given by a black teacher on supporting material, then have you respond to a brief quiz over the material. Therefore, you will need to listen carefully." The teacher then played the entire standard English tape on supporting material. After playing the tape, the test booklets were distributed. Subjects were instructed not to write their names, but the letter "A" at the top of the first page of the booklet. The teacher read the instructions for the information test aloud while the subjects followed along. The subjects were instructed to stop after completing the last multiple choice question in the booklet and wait for further instructions.

Subjects in Group I were then allowed twenty minutes to record their answers in the test booklet. They were then instructed to turn to the semantic differential type scales in the test booklet, and asked to follow along as the teacher read the instructions aloud for completing the scales. The teacher pronounced each word on the scales aloud and asked if there were any questions concerning the meaning of words involved with the scales. Subjects were then allowed to complete all of the semantic differential type scales. The test booklets were collected. Subjects were thanked for their participation.

The same teacher administered the entire study for Group II. The procedure for this group was the same; with the exception that Group II listened to the black dialect tape on supporting material, and labeled their test booklets with the letter "B".

Group III was taken to a different location to receive the information test only. The researcher read the instructions aloud for completing the information test while this group followed along. The subjects were instructed to label their test booklets appropriately without name identification. They were given twenty minutes to complete the information test. After collecting test booklets, they were thanked for their participation.

Data Analysis

Differences between mean comprehension scores for all groups were analyzed. Twenty-two papers were randomly selected from each group and used for purposes of the data analysis. Differences between mean credibility scores for Group I and Group II only, were analyzed. The level of significance for comprehension and credibility was set at $p < .05$. The group that was exposed to the standard English message and the group that was exposed to the black dialect message were compared by their responses on the information test and the semantic scales. The control group was used as a check on the test.

The first hypothesis concerned comprehension. It was hypothesized that comprehension would be different between language treatments. The following table reports the data in regard to comprehension.

TABLE 2

MEAN SCORES FOR COMPREHENSION

Black Dialect	Standard English	Control
7.73	8.41	6.91

Table 2 suggested that there was a difference in comprehension for the three groups, but that the difference was not significant. The subjects that heard the standard English speech performed better than those who heard the black dialect speech, but not significantly better. The black dialect group performed better than the control group, but not significantly better.

In order to compare the three groups, the comprehension scores were subjected to an analysis of variance. This analysis is reported in Table 3. As shown in the table, there was a difference between treatments, however, the difference was not significant at the .05 level. This may be due to the small sample size analyzed or other factors that are suggested in the last chapter of this paper.

TABLE 3

SUMMARY OF ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE

Source of Variation	SS	df	MS	F	P
Methods	24.82	2	12.41	1.13	NS
Error	689.50	63	10.94		
Total	714.32	65			

$F_{95}\ (63,2) = 3.15$

The second hypothesis of the research study concerned credibility. It was hypothesized that the credibility ratings for the speaker would be different between language treatments. Three factors emerged from the nine scales.

TABLE 4

FACTOR LOADING FOR CREDIBILITY SCALES

Scales	Expertness	Friendliness	Dynamism
Skilled-Unskilled	.4072	.0791	-.1462
Informed-Uninformed	.4111	.1403	-.1146
Friendly-Unfriendly	.0734	-.4080	-.2164
Kind-Unkind	-.2213	-.5571	.0477
Active-Passive	-.2157	-.0046	.6079
Energetic-Tired	-.1592	-.2996	.3337
Aggressive-Meek	.1509	.2178	.2826
Honest-Dishonest	.2204	-.0620	-.0859
Experienced-Inexperienced	.2038	.0438	.1629

The above table indicates the factor loading for all scales. It appears that the skilled and informed scales were correlated, the friendliness and kind scales were correlated, and that the active and energetic scales were correlated. Thus three factors of expertness, friendliness, and dynamism emerged.

At the .05 level, the necessary value for significant differences on expertness, friendliness, and dynamism dimensions was 2.011. For the expertness dimension, $t = 1.527$. For friendliness, $t = .386$. For the dynamism dimension, $t = .079$. The low scores for the three dimensions indicated that there was little difference between treatments with regard to credibility of the speaker. The mean scores for credibility are reported in the following table.

TABLE 5

MEAN SCORES FOR THREE CREDIBILITY DIMENSIONS

Treatment	Dynamism	Expertness	Friendliness
Black Dialect	5.91	5.55	4.23
Standard English	5.84	4.16	3.94

The total data analysis suggested that there was a difference in comprehension between language treatments, but that the difference was not significant. The data also

suggested that there was a difference in credibility. The black students rated the black dialect speech as being more credible, but not significantly more credible.

FOOTNOTES

[1]David Berlo, J. Lemert, and R. Mertz, "Dimensions for Evaluating the Acceptability of Message Scores," Public Opinion Quarterly, XXXIII (1969), 563-576.

CHAPTER IV

CONCLUSION

The data analysis suggested that language makes a difference in comprehension and credibility, but not a significant difference. This was true of white subjects in the pilot study and true of black subjects in the research study as well. Neither group learned significantly more from listening to standard English speech as compared to black dialect speech. White subjects in the pilot study rated black dialect speech as having significantly less expertness than standard English. Black subjects rated all three dimensions of credibility for the black dialect speech higher than the credibility for the standard English, but not significantly higher. Though the research study did not compare the white pilot subjects with black research subjects, the procedures were quite similar and suggests several things.

The standard English or black dialect speech seems to make little difference where comprehension of material is concerned with black or white subjects. This statement may put many middle-class parents at ease that fear the use of black dialect in the classroom. Another suggestion may be that the language spoken does not make as much difference for black students as it does for white students where expertness is concerned. This may

be due to the fact that most white students are not largely exposed to black dialect and regard the language as being of lower quality. This statement seems to be along the same lines as the study mentioned earlier by Williams in which white teachers, more than black teachers, tended to link race with status when listening to recordings.[1]

An explanation of the results of the research study may be explained in terms of motivation and conditioning. The data indicated that the two groups who were exposed to the language treatments did little better than the control group which was not exposed to any learning material. The differences between the groups in test performance were not significant. Perhaps the subjects who heard the learning tapes were not motivated to want to learn the material. The subjects were quiet and seemed attentive while the stimulus materials were being presented. Yet test performance indicated that comprehension for these subjects was little better than for the control group. The fact that subjects were not allowed to identify themselves by name may have decreased their motivation to do well on the information test to some degree.

When the writer uses the term "conditioned" in this paper it is meant to be rather general. The black student seems to be conditioned to listening to black dialect as well as standard English. He hears black dialect

at home and in the street. He hears standard English at school and on the television or radio. He is probably accustomed to decoding both languages since he is exposed to both languages so frequently. He may hear a sentence in standard English and unconsciously decode the sentence in black dialect. If this is the case, it is understandable why credibility was not significantly different between language treatments for the black student. He is familiar with both standard English and black dialect, and seem to regard both similarly where credibility is concerned.

IMPLICATIONS

It seems that much of the emphasis that is put on language difference in our society is unnecessary. Authorities who advocate that black students should learn to use standard English in addition to, not at the expense of the home language, are probably on the right track. According to the findings of this study, for black students, there are no significant differences in comprehension or credibility for either language. Comprehension was low in every case, whether the subjects were exposed to the learning material or not. The writer suggests that the emphasis placed on the distinction of

language in the classroom should not be so concentrated in this area as to neglect other important areas such as motivation. There seems to be something wrong if, after being exposed to learning material, black students do not perform any better than their peers who do not receive any prior material. Factors other than language, which are outside the domain of this study, may be involved.

Thus, in answer to the question of using black dialect learning materials or black dialect speech in the classroom--it probably makes little difference. This study implies that black students do not look upon black dialect learning materials as being less credible than those presented in standard English. In fact, black students rated such materials as being slightly more credible. But the startling fact is that, unless a need is created within these students to "want" to learn, they may comprehend little learning material at all.

FOOTNOTES

[1]Frederick Williams, "The Psychological Correlates of Speech Characteristics: On Sounding Disadvantaged," Journal of Speech and Hearing Research, XIII (September, 1970), 472-488.

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